

June 6, 2005

A statement in support of designating
“Sojourner Truth Day”
in the state of Michigan

(Senate Bill #384)

Sojourner Truth, the most famous African American woman of the 19th century, lived in Michigan for the last 27 years of life.

Born a slave called Isabella in 1797, this remarkable woman gave voice to a generation of blacks and women, despite being unable to read or to write, and having to endure a lifetime of poverty.

After she left slavery Isabella chose a new name – Sojourner Truth -- giving notice of how she would spend the rest of her life. She became a traveling preacher, bringing the truth about social justice to the men and women of the nation. She spoke passionately about the evils of slavery, advocated equal rights for women, described the evils of drink and campaigned against the injustice of capital punishment. She used her imposing physical presence, her powerful voice, her quick wit and her fearless tongue to fight for human rights for all people.

Truth came to Michigan in 1856 to give a speech. She moved here the next year and made Battle Creek her home for the rest of her life. She brought national prominence to Battle Creek and to Michigan as she traveled around the country.

Sojourner Truth was the conscience of the nation for over forty years. She had a deep, personal faith that guided all her efforts. She was, in her lifetime and beyond, a symbol of the strong black woman who could overcome obstacles, while retaining her strength and dignity.

It is only fitting that Michigan recognize the important contribution this extraordinary woman made to our state and to our nation by designating November 26 – the anniversary of her death in 1883 – as “Sojourner Truth Day.”

It is our hope that this designation will encourage Michigan residents, and future generations, to learn about Truth’s life and legacy – and to be inspired themselves to work for human rights in the spirit of Truth.

Velma Laws-Clay

Member Freedom Trail Commission

Chair of the Sojourner Truth Institute of Battle Creek